

SF's compost program key to healthier environment



PHOTO: CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

Efforts to help protect the environment often focus on the call to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. At the United Nations Climate Conference in December another initiative generated great interest—improving soil health to sequester carbon in topsoil.

Countries, cities, and advocates for regenerative farming practices, also known as agroecology, emphasized the ability of healthy soils and plants to pull carbon from the atmosphere and store it in soil. Cities can provide highly effective and ongoing support for this initiative by replicating **San Francisco's urban compost collection program**. Composting reduces greenhouse gas emissions from landfills and allows farms to shift from chemical fertilizers to compost, a soil amendment that helps grow healthy produce.

According to the US EPA, agricultural activities contribute to emissions in multiple ways. Fortunately, it is possible to turn farms and rangelands into sinks that pull carbon from the atmosphere.

The MarinCarbonProject.org headed by John Wick spread a half inch

of compost on a ranch in Nicasio six years ago. The compost application was a single event. It activated the life web in the soil and native grasses that pull carbon from the atmosphere thrived. Every year since, scientists from UC Berkeley have measured significant increases of carbon in Wick's soil.

Healthy soils equal healthy planet

Scientists, activists, officials, and journalists highlighted sustainable agriculture at the UN conference as a key response.

France's Ministry of Agriculture introduced the 4/1000 Initiative which aims to increase organic matter in soils by 4 parts per 1,000 per year. The plan calls for planting more trees, using compost and other natural soil amendments, and growing a variety of plants in ways that increase photosynthesis.

Scientists say such practices have the potential to cool environments while producing more healthy food. They say these steps, if implemented widely, could prove highly effective in our efforts to address the challenge of climate change.

"Agroecology is a major tool in fighting climate change," said Fritjof Capra, a physicist and ecologist.

Several teams at the conference presented videos highlighting the importance of improving soil health. To see two clips being shared on social media, type the following titles into a search engine or YouTube:

- **Soil Solutions to Climate Problems**, Center for Food Safety
- **Life in Syntropy**, Agenda Gotsch

The people who created these films offer high praise for San Francisco's compost collection program and say many more cities should institute curbside composting.

Farmers know firsthand that applying compost made from food scraps and plant cuttings offers multiple benefits to our environment and our lives, including fixing carbon in topsoil, producing healthy food, and saving water.

So, **please help create compost for local farms by placing ALL your food scraps and plant cuttings in your green compost collection bin.**

RecycleMyJunk for large items

San Franciscans can recycle large or bulky items that are broken through a special collection program provided by Recology. It's called RecycleMyJunk and is available to City residents at no additional cost.

Materials collected through the RMJ program include broken appliances, worn-out furniture, and other damaged household items that are big or heavy. Many people utilize RMJ to recycle old mattresses. Residents wanting to give way large items in good condition should contact donation agencies such as Goodwill.

Here is how the **RMJ** program works:

- Residents schedule a collection appointment through RecycleMyJunk.com or call (415) 330-1300.
- Residents are asked to list the type of items they want collected. This helps Recology know what truck to send. For example, if a customer needs an old washer and dryer picked up, we send a truck designated to collect metal items.
- Your collection will be scheduled for a specific day. Customers are asked to place items at the curb early in the morning. If customers are unable to bring their items to the curb, they can request an inside collection for a fee.



Mike Julian
Recology Sunset Scavenger

Other items often collected through this program include old carpets, broken printers, and textiles such as clothes and shoes. Smaller items must be boxed or bundled. We recycle most of the material collected through the RMJ program.

